

The Role of School Principals in Improving the Success of Elementary School Management: A Qualitative Case Study in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

The persistent challenges facing elementary education in Indonesia—ranging from inadequacies in curriculum design and instructional delivery to inefficiencies in resource management—necessitate transformative school leadership. This study critically investigates the strategic role of principals in improving educational quality through the integrated implementation of seven core leadership functions: as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. Employing a qualitative case study design in Kasihan District, Bantul Regency, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that effective principals drive curricular relevance and innovation, foster collaborative pedagogical planning, and promote the integration of educational technologies. Moreover, they facilitate continuous professional development, ensure transparent and efficient resource utilization, and nurture strong community engagement. The study concludes that school principals act as pivotal agents in cultivating adaptive, inclusive, and innovation-oriented learning environments. It recommends capacity-building programs for school leaders and teachers, enhanced governance mechanisms, and strengthened stakeholder partnerships. These insights contribute to both the practical discourse on educational leadership development and the broader theoretical understanding of strategic school governance within decentralized educational systems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of elementary education in Indonesia remains a pressing concern, attracting persistent scrutiny from educational stakeholders and the wider public. This concern stems from a complex web of challenges, including the inadequacy of curriculum design, ineffective instructional practices, inconsistent student and teacher management, insufficient educational infrastructure, and the underdevelopment of school culture grounded in civic and ethical values. These issues are not isolated phenomena but indicators of deeper structural problems within the national education system. According to the 2023 Indonesian Education Report issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek Republik Indonesia, 2023), only 61.53% of students meet the minimum literacy benchmark, while 46.67% reach the minimum standard in numeracy. The scores for character education stand at 53.17, while the school environment—assessed through indicators of religious and cultural tolerance and national commitment—records a score of merely 67.64. The overall quality of learning management is similarly deficient, with an index score of just 65.39.

Beyond these measurable deficiencies, qualitative issues further complicate the educational landscape. Weak governance practices, insufficient educational financing, suboptimal engagement of School Committees, and the dilapidated state of school facilities are among the most persistent systemic barriers. National assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), paint an equally alarming picture: 70% of students perform below minimum proficiency in reading, 71% in mathematics, and 60% in science (Ditjen PAUDDIKDASMEN, 2020). These figures are mirrored at the regional level, such as in Bantul Regency, where elementary education units continue to struggle with unmet Minimum Service Standards (SPM), poorly aligned funding allocations, outdated curriculum content, and a shortage of competent school principals and teachers (Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Balitbang Kemendikbud, 2017).

The Bantul Education Report (Dinas Pendidikan, 2021) further highlights that literacy and numeracy competencies are still below expectations—at 70% and 50% respectively—while the implementation of Pancasila-based character values remains stagnant at 60%. Alarmingly, only 0.02% of local school principals and teachers have participated in the national "Guru Penggerak" program. Other issues include the unequal distribution of teaching staff, poor classroom management practices, and a lack of systemic support for students' psychological well-being.

Against this backdrop, the school principal emerges as a critical agent of change. As mandated by Regulation No. 40 of 2021 from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, principals are expected to act as learning leaders who not only manage administrative functions but also provide pedagogical direction, lead school improvement efforts, and cultivate innovation. This expanded role encompasses seven core functions: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. Numerous studies affirm the centrality of these roles in shaping the quality of school governance and student outcomes (Bezes et al., 2012; Hanafiah et al., 2023; Kuswaeri, 2016; Noprika et al., 2020; Rochaendi & Ma'mun, 2024).

Nevertheless, the realization of these functions is far from uniform. Research by Asmarani (2014) and Sennen (2017) documents persistent gaps in the professionalism and leadership capacities of school principals, especially in the areas of supervision and school-based management. The Directorate General for Teachers and Education Personnel (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan Kemdikbud, 2020) has also noted widespread limitations in principals' ability to lead schools in a strategic, accountable, and innovation-oriented manner. While prior scholarship has addressed specific aspects of school leadership—such as managerial efficiency (Rochaendi, 2023; Rochaendi et al., 2024, 2025), instructional supervision (Salim, 2023b), or administrative compliance (Noprika et al., 2020)—there is a marked absence of integrative studies that analyze how these seven roles are enacted holistically and contextually in under-resourced elementary school environments.

This gap in the literature calls for a more comprehensive inquiry—one that not only identifies the normative functions of school principals but critically evaluates how these roles are implemented in

practice, particularly in response to real-world constraints and evolving educational demands. It is within this empirical and conceptual space that the present study is situated.

Accordingly, this research aims to explore the practical application and interrelationship of the principal's seven core functions in elementary school management, with a focused case study in Kasihan District, Bantul Regency. The study seeks to generate an in-depth understanding of how principals exercise leadership in resource-limited contexts, navigate institutional challenges, and implement sustainable innovations. In doing so, this study contributes not only to the advancement of practical school leadership models but also to the theoretical enrichment of educational management discourse in Indonesia and comparable settings.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore, in depth, the implementation of school principals' functions in managing elementary education units in Kasihan District, Bantul Regency. The case study approach was chosen for its capacity to investigate complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, allowing the researcher to examine leadership practices holistically in relation to institutional, socio-cultural, and pedagogical dynamics (Rahardjo, 2017).

The study involved six elementary schools selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in school characteristics. The sample consisted of three public and three private schools, each representing different levels of accreditation—one school with accreditation A, one with B, and one with C from each school type. This sampling design was intended to reflect variations in institutional quality, governance models, and available resources. Kasihan District was selected as the research site because it encompasses a representative range of school types and continues to face persistent challenges in educational quality, as documented in regional education reports.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Research participants consisted of principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents from the selected schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain detailed insights into how principals enacted their seven leadership functions—as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator—including the challenges encountered and strategies employed. Observations were conducted within the school environment to capture the principals' interactions with stakeholders, participation in routine school activities, and leadership in daily operations. Document analysis was carried out to examine school policies, strategic plans, organizational structures, and administrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis followed a systematic multi-stage process, consisting of: (1) data organization and reduction through transcription and field note compilation; (2) descriptive analysis to gain a preliminary understanding of leadership practices; (3) coding and categorization to identify recurring themes and patterns; (4) thematic and cross-case analysis to compare practices across different schools and accreditation levels; and (5) validation through data triangulation and member checking to ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings. This analytical approach was intended to preserve the richness of qualitative data while enhancing internal validity and theoretical robustness.

Ultimately, this study aims to generate contextually grounded and theoretically informed insights into how elementary school principals carry out their leadership functions in diverse institutional settings. The findings are expected to inform the development of more effective, adaptive, and sustainable leadership competency frameworks and policies in the field of educational management.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Finding

This study reveals the pivotal role of school principals in improving the quality of elementary education through their strategic leadership, particularly in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school programs. The analysis is structured according to the seven core functions of

school leadership—educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator—as outlined in national policy and prior theoretical frameworks. The empirical data gathered from six elementary schools—comprising both public and private institutions across accreditation levels A, B, and C—provide a comprehensive picture of how these functions are carried out in diverse institutional contexts.

To present a more structured and comparative view of these findings, Table 1 synthesizes the observed practices across schools by mapping key behaviors and patterns for each leadership function, comparing public and private schools, and highlighting contextual variations based on accreditation levels.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Principal Functions Across School Types and Accreditation Levels

| Principal Function | Key Practices Observed | Public School (A-B-C) | Private School (A-B-C) | Comparative Analysis Summary |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Educator | Curriculum development, teacher involvement, character integration | Strong in A-B; C lacks stakeholder engagement | A is strong; B-C weak in integration | Public schools more structured; private schools rely on individual initiative |
| Manager | Strategic planning, team systems, task delegation | A-B: Effective team systems; C: Limited coordination | A: Strong planning; B-C: Ad-hoc planning | A: Strong planning; B-C: Ad-hoc planning |
| Administrator | Documentation, reporting, facilities management | A: Strong; B: Adequate; C: Fragmented | A: Uses digital systems; B-C: Manual reports | Accreditation A schools (both types) lead in administrative effectiveness |
| Supervisor | Supervision plans, feedback, reflective practices | A-B: Routine and structured; C: Limited follow-up | A: Some feedback cycles; B-C: Irregular | Public schools more systematic; private schools vary based on leadership style |
| Leader | Vision articulation, participatory governance | A: Vision aligned with action; B-C: Moderate | A: Inclusive; B-C: Principal-driven | Accreditation A fosters clearer vision execution across school types |
| Innovator | Tech adoption, project-based learning | A: E-learning integrated; B: Some attempts; C: Minimal | A: Active innovation; B-C: Conservative | Private A schools most experimental; public B and C slower to adapt |
| Motivator | Mentoring, appreciation, positive climate | A: Structured mentoring; B-C: Moderate | A: Creative programs; B-C: Limited resources | Private A schools leverage personal touch; public schools more procedural |

The findings demonstrate that principals in Kasihan District exhibit notable strengths in several domains, particularly in developing relevant and innovative curricula aligned with both academic standards and character education. They actively engage teachers in curriculum design and utilize regular feedback from students and parents to revise instructional plans. These efforts are supported by ongoing formative evaluations and the integration of e-learning platforms that improve student engagement and monitoring.

In terms of managerial function, effective principals have implemented five-year strategic plans that are collaboratively formulated and focus on both academic achievement and student well-being. They organize school resources efficiently by forming work teams with clear divisions of responsibility. However, differences emerge across accreditation levels: public schools with accreditation A and B display stronger structural planning, while some private schools—especially those with accreditation C—tend to rely on informal or ad-hoc planning approaches.

Administratively, high-performing schools (especially accreditation A) show robust systems for documentation, reporting, and facilities management. Some private schools even employ digital systems for administrative tasks, whereas schools with lower accreditation levels still rely on manual processes and demonstrate inconsistencies in record-keeping and resource maintenance.

The supervisory function is generally well-executed in public schools, where structured supervision plans and the use of objective performance rubrics are standard. Principals conduct classroom observations and feedback sessions, often followed by reflective discussions and documentation through digital tools. Nevertheless, some teachers across schools still exhibit resistance to evaluation processes, perceiving them as judgmental rather than developmental. Effective principals mitigate this by fostering open dialogue and reframing supervision as a collaborative, growth-oriented process.

Leadership is demonstrated in the articulation and implementation of vision and mission statements, which are developed through participatory processes involving teachers, students, and parents. In the best-performing schools, visions are actively socialized and embedded into daily practices through workshops, bulletins, and school events. Instructional leadership is also evident through principals' involvement in classroom visits, teacher coaching, and the promotion of professional learning communities.

Innovation is primarily observed in accreditation A schools, where principals have initiated programs such as project-based learning and digital classrooms. These schools conduct systematic needs analyses and provide targeted training for teachers on new pedagogical models. However, conservative school cultures and limited access to technological infrastructure still hinder innovation in some accreditation B and C schools. To overcome these barriers, some principals introduce "Monthly Innovation" awards and collaborative experimentation projects to foster a creative culture.

Finally, as motivators, principals focus on cultivating a positive school climate through mentoring programs, recognition ceremonies, and team-building activities. Effective leaders personalize their approach by understanding individual teachers' needs and aspirations, providing support through motivational talks, letters of appreciation, and social events such as the "Healthy Program" and "Togetherness Day." These practices have been shown to significantly boost morale, strengthen collegial relationships, and reinforce collective identity, even in the face of limited budgets and varying individual motivation levels.

In conclusion, while accreditation level plays a significant role in shaping the quality of leadership practices, the type of school (public vs. private) also influences how each of the principal's core functions is operationalized. These findings suggest the need for differentiated leadership development strategies that are sensitive to contextual realities and institutional diversity.

3.2. Discussion

This study reveals the crucial role of principals in ensuring education quality through planning, implementing, and evaluating learning. Effective principals are involved in developing relevant and

innovative curricula, involving teachers in planning, and ensuring the curriculum meets students' academic and character needs. In Kasihan, principals successfully developed comprehensive syllabi focusing on character and life skills development for students and held regular meetings to revise the curriculum based on feedback from students and parents. Additionally, principals actively monitor and evaluate learning activities, encourage the use of technology such as e-learning platforms, and implement formative evaluations to track students' progress.

a. Curriculum Planning and Learning Evaluation

According to education management theory, principals act as leaders in designing adaptive and responsive curricula to changing times. Bush & Glover (2014), (Zainiyati, 2016) and (Salim, 2023) state that effective curricula must reflect students' needs and global societal demands. In Kasihan, principals have developed curricula focusing on academic aspects and character formation through integrated learning activities. These curricula are developed by involving teachers in the planning process, creating relevant and innovative curricula. Principals hold regular meetings to discuss and revise curricula based on feedback from various stakeholders, including students and parents. This aligns with the feedback loop theory in education management proposed by (Bezes et al., 2012; Clinton & Hattie, 2014), which states that constructive feedback is key to continuous improvement.

Principals in Kasihan also implement formative evaluations to continuously monitor students' progress. These evaluations involve various methods such as daily tests, group projects, and presentations, allowing teachers to deeply assess students' understanding. According to (Black & Wiliam, 1998) formative evaluation is one of the most effective strategies to improve students' learning outcomes as it provides useful information for teachers to adjust their teaching according to students' needs.

According to education experts like John Dewey, principals who actively engage in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning reflect progressive education principles. Dewey emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning and the curriculum's relevance to daily life. The practice of principals in Kasihan, who develop comprehensive syllabi and involve teachers and the community in curriculum planning, aligns with this theory, showing that continuous collaboration and feedback are key to meaningful and effective education.

b. Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development is a main focus, providing training and workshops to enhance their competencies. Principals in Kasihan organize regular training, invite education experts, and encourage creativity and innovation in teaching through problem-based projects. Sachs & Parsell (2014) states that effective professional development requires continuous and relevant training for teachers' needs. Principals in Kasihan ensure that provided training focuses on improving teachers' pedagogical and managerial competencies. They also encourage teachers to engage in classroom action research to improve their teaching practices (Waseem et al., 2013)

Using technology in learning is also encouraged by principals in Kasihan. They utilize e-learning platforms to expand students' access to learning materials and facilitate more flexible learning. Danielson et al. (2024) and Yangambi (2021) emphasize the importance of integrating technology into education as a way to prepare students to face 21st-century challenges. Principals in Kasihan have implemented various educational technologies such as learning management systems (LMS) and interactive learning applications to enhance teaching and learning quality in schools.

c. Resource Management and Community Relations

Principals also play a role in character building for students by implementing mentoring programs and ensuring moral and ethical values are taught in schools. According to human resource management theory in education, principals are responsible for optimizing resource use to support educational goals (Omebe, 2014). Principals in Kasihan have successfully managed learning resources

by providing adequate facilities such as comfortable classrooms, complete libraries, and modern laboratories.

Relationships with parents and the school community are also well-maintained through regular meetings and effective communication. Principals hold meetings with the school committee and parents to discuss school developments and gain constructive feedback. (Fullan, 2015) states that transparency and accountability in school management increase community trust in educational institutions. Principals in Kasihan have built strong relationships with the surrounding community, supporting various school activities such as community partnership programs and extracurricular activities.

Henry Fayol, a classical management expert, emphasizes the importance of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling in management (Qutni et al., 2021). Principals in Kasihan demonstrate a deep understanding of these principles by developing realistic long-term strategic plans, organizing resources optimally, and managing finances and facilities transparently. The practice of involving various stakeholders in strategic planning and clear task distribution reflects effective and efficient management principles.

d. Strategic Planning and Financial Management

As managers, principals are responsible for strategic planning, resource organization, financial management, facilities and infrastructure, and community relations. Effective principals can develop realistic long-term strategic plans involving all stakeholders. In Kasihan, five-year strategic plans focus on improving academic quality and character development for students. Principals ensure that all resources, both human and material, are optimally used to support the learning process.

Transparent and accountable financial management is crucial to ensure smooth school operations. Good principals manage budgets wisely, ensuring funds are used according to priorities and school needs. According to transparency and accountability theory in education, good financial management practices increase community trust in schools (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Carvalho et al., 2021). In Kasihan, principals compile detailed financial reports, involve the school committee in overseeing fund use, and seek additional funding sources through cooperation with external parties.

Fullan (2015) emphasizes that effective educational administration must focus on continuous change and innovation. Principals who implement digital archiving systems and use school management applications demonstrate an understanding of efficient administration's importance and adaptability to technology. This allows better data management and transparency in school operations, supporting Fullan's change leadership model.

e. Supervision and Teacher Professional Development

As supervisors, principals are responsible for planning and implementing effective supervision to ensure teaching and learning quality. Good principals develop annual supervision plans that include objectives, methods, and supervision schedules. According to Sergiovanni (2017), effective supervision must involve continuous evaluation processes and support teacher professional development. In Kasihan, principals hold early-year meetings with teachers to agree on supervision plans. Supervision methods used include classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis to get a comprehensive view of teachers' performance (Leithwood et al., 2018; Rochaendi, 2024).

Teacher performance monitoring and evaluation are routinely conducted with objective and standardized evaluation instruments, such as assessment rubrics covering pedagogical, managerial, and interpersonal aspects. Principals in Kasihan provide constructive and specific feedback after each supervision session and hold joint reflection sessions with teachers to discuss findings and improvement strategies. According to (Danielson et al., 2024), specific and constructive feedback is key to effective professional development.

Glickman (2013) and Kotirde & Bin Md Yunos (2015) underscores the importance of collaboration and reflection-based supervision. Principals in Kasihan who conduct routine supervision, provide

constructive feedback, and hold joint reflection sessions with teachers reflect a supervision approach that supports professional development and teaching quality improvement. Using objective assessment rubrics and deep reflection sessions are good practices that strengthen teacher competence.

f. Leadership and Vision

As leaders, principals are responsible for developing clear and inspiring school visions and missions. Effective principals can formulate visions and missions that reflect the aspirations of all school members through workshops with teachers, students, and parents. Instructional leadership of principals involves actively directing and supporting teaching activities, including classroom visits for observations and feedback, and organizing training and workshops to enhance teachers' pedagogical competencies. According to Leithwood et al. (2018), strong instructional leadership is crucial in improving students' academic performance.

Participatory decision-making involves all stakeholders in important decisions, listening to input from teachers, students, and parents through school committee meetings, surveys, and discussion forums. Principals are also responsible for creating a positive school culture by prioritizing values such as cooperation, respect, and responsibility, as seen in the "Child-Friendly School" program that implements anti-bullying policies and community-building activities. Additionally, principals encourage innovation and change, such as the "Digital School" initiative, and motivate and reward outstanding teachers and students through the "Outstanding Teacher and Student" program. Challenges such as lack of community support and resistance to change are addressed by building good relationships with the community and using participatory approaches in implementing changes (Rehbock, 2020).

Bush & Coleman (2000) and Kouzes & Posner (2017) emphasize that effective leaders must inspire a shared vision and encourage innovation. Principals who articulate clear visions and missions, hold workshops to formulate visions, and initiate innovative programs such as "Digital School" demonstrate strong leadership abilities. Participatory approaches in decision-making and creating positive school cultures are good practices reflecting transformational leadership theory (Carvalho et al., 2021; Kuswaeri, 2016).

g. Innovation and Technology Use

As innovators, principals must identify needs and innovation opportunities that can improve education quality. Effective principals conduct thorough needs analyses, such as surveys and interviews with teachers, students, and parents to gather data on their needs. According to (Kilig, 2022), innovation in education must be based on comprehensive needs analyses and careful planning. In Kasihan, principals have developed technology-based learning programs to improve digital literacy. These programs involve using e-learning platforms and interactive learning applications that allow students to access learning materials online.

Developing and implementing innovative initiatives requires careful planning and structured implementation. Another example in Kasihan is the "Project-Based School" program, where students learn through interdisciplinary projects involving various subjects. Principals also hold workshops for teachers on project-based learning methods. According to project-based learning theory proposed by John. W. Thomas (2000) and L. S. Thomas (2019), this method is effective in enhancing students' critical thinking and creativity skills.

(Hasanah & Mustofa, 2024; Quay, 2019), in his disruptive innovation theory, shows that successful innovation often arises from effective technology use. Principals in Kasihan who develop project-based programs and use e-learning platforms are real examples of applying technology to enhance learning effectiveness. Routine training programs and innovative initiative evaluations show a systematic approach to developing and implementing innovations.

h. Motivation and Empowerment

As motivators, principals must motivate teachers and staff to work with high spirit and dedication. Effective principals understand the needs and aspirations of each teacher and staff and provide appropriate support (Herzberg, 2017; Rochaendi et al., 2025). A good practice example in Kasihan is motivational and mentoring sessions for new teachers to help them adapt and provide personal appreciation through direct remarks or appreciation letters. Building a positive work climate is also important, with principals prioritizing open communication, mutual respect, and collaboration. Another example is the "Healthy Program" that invites teachers and staff to participate in joint sports activities and family picnic events to strengthen relationships among school members.

Inspiring and providing vision is the principal's ability to convey a clear and relevant vision, inspiring all school members to work towards common goals. Effective principals articulate their vision through various forums and visual media and hold discussion sessions to align the vision with the aspirations of all school members (Rochaendi et al., 2024). Empowering and developing teacher and staff capacity is also important with training programs, workshops, and support for further education and professional certification.

Herzberg (2017) and Smith & Brown (2019), in his two-factor motivation theory, emphasizes the importance of motivation and maintenance factors in the work environment. Principals who create positive work climates, provide fair rewards, and build a sense of togetherness demonstrate a deep understanding of motivation. The "Togetherness Day" and monthly appreciation programs are good practices that strengthen teachers' and staff's spirit and dedication according to Herzberg's principles.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm the pivotal role of school principals in ensuring the quality of educational management through their multidimensional leadership in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning processes. Effective principals are not only capable of designing relevant and innovative curricula, but also of meaningfully engaging teachers in the curriculum development process. In Kasihan District, exemplary principals successfully formulated comprehensive syllabi that integrate character and life skills education, and conducted periodic revisions informed by systematic feedback from students and parents. Furthermore, principals actively supervise learning implementation, promote the integration of educational technology such as e-learning platforms, and employ formative assessments to continuously monitor student progress.

Principals also serve as strategic managers by developing realistic long-term school development plans, organizing resources efficiently, managing school finances transparently, and cultivating productive relationships with the community. The findings demonstrate that school principals in Kasihan apply accountable financial practices and establish participatory decision-making mechanisms to enhance stakeholder involvement. As supervisors, they develop annual supervision frameworks, provide constructive and evidence-based feedback, and conduct joint reflection sessions with teachers—practices that contribute to instructional improvement.

In their role as leaders, principals articulate compelling school visions and missions, foster an inclusive and positive school culture, and become agents of innovation and change. The cumulative insights of this study offer a strong empirical foundation for informing strategic interventions and policy directions aimed at enhancing principal competencies. These findings contribute not only to the development of more effective and sustainable leadership programs but also offer theoretical perspectives for expanding the discourse on distributed and transformative school leadership within the context of School-Based Management (SBM).

To advance the quality of school-based educational management, principals should strengthen comprehensive and inclusive strategic planning that actively involves all key stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and community members. Principals are encouraged to prioritize regular, contextual, and competency-oriented professional development programs for teachers, which cultivate pedagogical innovation and creative instructional approaches.

Educational technology should be fully utilized to support both learning and administration. Tools such as interactive digital platforms, online assessments, and school management applications must be integrated systematically to improve efficiency and transparency. Resource management should be performed with high levels of accountability, ensuring that school budgets and infrastructure are aligned with student learning needs and institutional goals.

Equally important, principals must build and maintain strong partnerships with the broader community. Effective communication strategies, community involvement in school activities, and shared responsibility for student development can foster social capital and enhance external support for school improvement. Within the scope of instructional leadership, supervision must be continuous and constructive. Developing clear annual supervision plans, providing specific and meaningful feedback, and conducting regular joint reflections with teaching staff are essential to maintain high instructional standards.

Principals must also champion the development of inspiring and realistic school visions and missions that reflect the collective aspirations of all school members. Fostering a positive and inclusive work environment, built on mutual respect, open communication, and fair recognition, will elevate teacher morale and enhance organizational commitment. By implementing this holistic leadership approach, principals can more effectively fulfill their roles and support sustained improvements in school performance and student outcomes.

Practical implications of this study are substantial, especially in the realm of principal development policy and educational leadership training. The empirical evidence provided may guide educational stakeholders in designing competency-based principal preparation programs, incorporating reflective supervision, instructional leadership, innovation management, and stakeholder engagement.

At the same time, this study offers theoretical contributions to the broader field of educational leadership. It expands current understandings of how leadership functions operate within decentralized governance systems like SBM. By illustrating the interplay between principal leadership and school governance components, this research supports the conceptual framework of integrated, context-sensitive leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014; Carvalho et al., 2021). Moreover, it affirms the relevance of transformative and strategic leadership models in promoting inclusive, collaborative, and innovation-driven school cultures.

In conclusion, principals who embody multi-functional leadership aligned with the principles of School-Based Management are more likely to create effective, innovative, and equitable learning environments. Their leadership is not only operational but transformative—offering pathways to elevate both the institutional quality of schools and the lifelong learning capacities of the students they serve.

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